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## Anne Cooke Bacon

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## Bacon, Anne Cooke (ca. 1528–1610)

*Writer, religious reform thinker, and translator*

Motivated by religious piety and a remarkable education, Anne Cooke Bacon was one of the most prominent and prolific women writers in Renaissance England. Scholars have called attention in particular to the transformation her writing underwent after the death of her husband, Sir Nicholas Bacon, in 1579. While he lived, Cooke Bacon translated religious works, modestly keeping the focus on the ideas of others. When she became a widow, she assumed a new voice and tone—assertive and often domineering—in letters of advice not only to her adult sons but to prominent male political figures as well.

Born in 1527 or 1528 to Sir Anthony Cooke and Lady Anne Fitzwilliam, Cooke Bacon received, in her youth, a rigorous education in history, classics, philosophy, and theology that undergirds all her writings. In 1548, her translations of sermons by the Italian Calvinist Bernardino Ochino were first published. Over the next twelve years, they were printed two more times in tandem with another (male) translator's work. In 1564, Cooke Bacon translated from the Latin the official text justifying the Church of England. Her translation, *Apologie of the Church of England*, became the official edition, superseding the existing translation.

Cooke Bacon's learning and religious conviction also remain central in the letters she wrote as a widow. Acting on her Protestant, nonconformist beliefs, she wrote numerous letters to support Puritan preachers. For example, in 1584/1585, she wrote to William Cecil requesting a private conference at court for several Puritan preachers. Such advocacy matches

her ongoing support of nonconformist preachers through local appointments and financial assistance. Cooke Bacon's religious zeal took a more private turn in her letters to her two adult sons, Anthony and Francis. Between 1592 and 1596 alone, she wrote them over one hundred letters. She admonishes them to practice godly living, offers political counsel, and dictates the terms on which she will rescue them from repeated debt. Her financial independence gave her power over her sons, and she used this power to assert opinion with unflinching authority. Her sons, however, were not the only recipients of her chastising letters. In 1596, she wrote Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, reprimanding him for sexual misconduct. Strong-willed and learned, Anne Cooke Bacon, who died in 1610, achieved a rare independence and prominence in the patriarchal world of Renaissance England.

Linda Shenk

**See also** Education, Humanism, and Women; Literary Culture and Women; Religious Reform and Women; Translation and Women Translators.

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